

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY:
Diana O'Donoghue, Executive Director
Connecticut Chapter
New England Convenience Store Association
Public Health Committee
March 5, 2007

RE: Testimony Relative to SB 661; AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT PREFERENCES REGARDING THE LAWS OF CONNECTICUT RELATED TO PUBLIC HEALTH.

Chairwoman Handley, Chairwoman Sayers, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Chapter of the New England Convenience Store Association (NECSA). Our membership opposes SB 661, the legislation that would increase the legal age limit for purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21. NECSA represents over 400 convenience stores and petroleum operators throughout Connecticut. NECSA's membership consists of independent, family owned convenience stores, independently owned franchise stores as well as chain-operated stores.

For many reasons, NECSA opposes SB 661. While controversial, tobacco is a legal product and one that is important to the economic viability of the convenience store industry in the state. According to the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS), tobacco product sales constitute nearly 35 percent of the average in-store sale.

Raising the minimum age to 21 will hurt businesses in Connecticut. If the bill passes, then 18, 19 and 20 year old individuals will go to Rhode Island, Massachusetts or another state and legally purchase any tobacco product or they may order them over the Internet.

A second consideration is that Connecticut will lose out on significant tax revenues. Also, it is unfair to 18, 19, and 20 year old individuals to raise the age of purchase. The United States Congress believes 18 year olds are mature enough and educated enough to make decisions. In 1992, Congress passed legislation that gives states incentives to have laws prohibiting the sale or distribution of tobacco products to persons under 18 years of age.

Currently, 18-year-olds may vote, serve in the military, enter into contracts, serve on a jury and marry and those are just a few of the recognized legal responsibilities of that age group.

These tobacco customers also purchase gasoline, beverages, and food. Therefore, if the minimum age is increased, then overall related sales will suffer along with our tobacco sales because these customers will stop coming into our members' stores.

We urge you not to raise the minimum age to purchase tobacco.
Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.